



Prayer Before Studying Theology:

O God, the Father of lights, from whom comes down every good and perfect gift; mercifully look upon our frailty and infirmity, and grant us such health of body as you know is needful for us; that both in body and soul we evermore serve you with all our strength; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

--John Cosin

Teaching the Church to Pray: Early Christian Expositions of the Lord's Prayer (III)

- **Cyril of Jerusalem's *Mystagogical Catecheses* (347-348)**
- **Gregory of Nyssa (c. 335-394) *Sermons 1-5 on the Lord's Prayer***

Cyril of Jerusalem: Life and Works

The Church suffered through severe persecutions in the middle of the third century and again in the beginning of the fourth century. The Church was then torn apart by the Arian controversy. (Was Christ God? If so, how and in what way?)

Jerusalem in the Early Christian Period

Jerusalem had also suffered during the first four centuries, being badly damaged after the uprising against Rome in A.D. 70 and then being razed in 132 after the Bar Kochba uprising. Hadrian then established a Roman city Aelia Capitolina on the ruins and covering the remains of the ancient temple with a Roman imperial building. Although bishops existed at Jerusalem in the third century, the town was dependent upon the see of Caesarea, although it was recognized to have a special honor, being associated with the events of Christ's life and an object of pilgrimage. (It could also be seen while on the way to or from visiting the major ascetic/monastic institutions of Egypt, which also became a major center of pilgrimage in their own right from the fourth century onward.) The way in which Holy Week [i.e. the church services of the week before Easter] was celebrated in Jerusalem influenced the way Holy Week was later subsequently celebrated at Rome, no doubt due to descriptions brought back by Roman pilgrims who had visited Jerusalem.

Cyril of Jerusalem: Life and Works

Cyril was

- ordained a deacon c. 335 by Macarius, the bishop of Jerusalem and
- a priest c. 345 by Maximus, Macarius' successor,
- becoming bishop himself c. 350 when Maximus died.

The eastern church was at that time being torn apart by controversies related to later Arianism. Since the see of Caesarea, upon which Jerusalem depended, was occupied

by Acacius, a learned man who played a role in the later Arian controversy and held a position at variance with orthodoxy, it has sometimes been questioned whether Cyril had received his appointment to the episcopate only after agreeing to make concessions to Arianism. This does not seem to have been the case and Cyril's appointment probably reflects the increasing independence of Jerusalem from Caesarea (which would ultimately result in the elevation of Jerusalem to the level of a see in 451).

Tensions between Jerusalem and Caesarea increased for a variety of doctrinal, personal and political reasons, leading to Cyril's deposition by a council at Jerusalem in 357. He fled to Tarsus and was restored to his position by the Council of Seleucia, only to be banished again by Acacius in 360. He was restored to his position at Julian's ascension in 362 (together with all the other exiled bishops). He was banished again by the Emperor Valens in 367 and regained his position only with Valens' death in 378. He participated in the Second Ecumenical Council of Constantinople in 381 (which closed the door on the later Arian controversies and defined subsequent orthodoxy), dying in 386.

Other extant works attributed to Cyril include a few fragments, an Epistle to Constantius and a sermon on the Pool of Bethesda, the authenticity of all of these having been questioned. There is even some doubt about whether the five *Mystagogical Catecheses* (=Catecheses 19-23) should actually be attributed to Cyril's successor, John (bishop of Jerusalem, 386-417), based on an attribution in some of the manuscripts and on certain liturgical features which have been argued to be innovations of a later date.

The Sacramental and Spiritual Teaching of the *Mystagogical Catecheses*

The *Procatechesis* and *Catecheses* 1-18 were addresses given to persons seeking baptism at the coming Easter.

The *Procatechesis* was delivered in the presence of the whole congregation and emphasizes to the candidates the need for appreciating the seriousness of the step they are taking and highlights the need for proper preparation and true repentance.

- Baptism is not to be received for social reasons (p. 42), although the "one who has come with an unsound purpose" may yet "be saved by a good hope" (p. 43), when he or she learns from the catechesis what it is to surrender to Christ and accepts this teaching.
- In baptism (the washing of regeneration; cf. Tit. 3:5 and pp. 46,58)
 - one is crucified with Christ, dies with Christ, is buried with Christ and is raised together with Christ (cf. Rom. 6)
 - is cleansed of one's sins
 - is adopted as a child of God and
 - one's heart and mind is illuminated and renewed by the Spirit.
- Baptism is not to be repeated; p. 44 [bottom]: "None but heretics are to be rebaptized, since their former baptism was not baptism."
- Note also the role of exorcism (p. 45).
- Note the outline of the rule of faith (*regula fidei*) (cf. Heb. 6:1-2) on p. 47
- Note the *disciplina arcani* (p. 47)
 - The practices peculiar to the Christian community are not to be freely discussed with non-Christians who are uninterested in or hostile to the faith.

- The fitness of the hearer determines what should be said.
- Don't offer the Gospel without the working of the Spirit, else the recipient will simply have a form of godliness without the power (think one understands and has grasped the faith when one has not), so is in worse shape than when one started.
- The seeker (catechumen) should be instructed by persons set aside by the Church to teach the faith (catechist/bishop)
- Separation of the sexes and the observation and regulation of their conduct toward each other.

Catecheses 1-18 mostly consist of expositions of the baptismal creed used at Jerusalem.

The five *Mystagogical Catecheses* were addressed to the newly baptized after Easter, apparently during the Paschal Octave (eight days after Easter) in c. 348, having been taken down in shorthand. (By the end of the fourth century, Egeria relates that an interpreter was always present to translate these catechetical addresses from Greek into Syriac [presumably Christian Palestinian Aramaic], so that all could understand and this custom may go back to Cyril's day.)

- The first three *Mystagogical Catecheses* deal with baptism and chrismation,
- the fourth with the doctrine of the Lord's Supper and
- the fifth with the liturgy of the Lord's Supper.

Baptism (*Myst. Catech.* 1-3)

Preparation for baptism involves putting off the old life and presenting oneself without reservation to receive Christ and be filled with the Holy Spirit:

- p. 53: renunciation of the Devil facing west (pp. 53-56; cf. the temptation of Jesus in the wilderness at the outset of his ministry in Lk. 4:5-8; compare Lk. 16:8,13; 1 Cor. 15:24; and Eph. 2:1-3), then turning east to receive Christ (as the Sun) and enter into paradise (pp. 53-56).
 - Fundamental and comprehensive paradigm shift
 - Points to and emphasizes division between Christian life/society and the non-Christian life/society of the broader culture
- pp. 56-57: against popular entertainment and fortune-tellers
- p. 59: putting of garments=putting off old life
- p. 60: prayer of exorcism/anointing—led to baptism, answer to an interrogatory creed, descend three times into water (signifying burial with Christ in his death/dying to the old nature and ascending to life with his resurrection) (cf. p. 64).
- p. 64: chrismation=post-baptismal anointing with oil on forehead (with sign of cross), ears, nose and breast and invocation of the Holy Spirit (p. 65)=anointing by the Holy Ghost
 - p. 66; gift of the seal of the Spirit, cf. Eph.
 - Type/antitype relation to descent of the Spirit on Christ immediately after his baptism.

The Lord's Supper (*Myst. Catech. 4*)

- pp. 68-70: On the Lord's Supper—when those in Christ receive what Christ offers of himself, they become partakers of the divine nature (but see also the trope of pp. 65 and 74 on the conversion [*metabole*] of the elements after the invocation and note the ambiguity of p. 79 [top])
- pp. 70-71 faith vs. appearances (cf. Aquinas)

On the Eucharistic Liturgy (*Myst. Catech. 5*)

- pp. 71-72: priest washes hands before praying (repudiation of sin necessary before entering into prayer and receiving holy things)
- p. 72: kiss of peace—reconciliation effected
- pp. 72-73: *sursum corda* (Priest: “Lift up your hearts” ; People: “We lift them up unto the Lord”) and thanksgiving
- pp. 73-74: adoration of the heavenly host, to which believers join their own prayers and *trisagion* (“Holy, holy, holy”; cf. Rev.)
- p. 74: invocation of the Holy Spirit and conversion of the elements
- pp. 74-75: prayers for the church and commemoration of the saints
- pp. 75: followed by the Lord's Prayer which since it is used in the communion liturgy is here expounded.
- pp. 75-78:
 - “Father” addressed to God by those whose sins he has forgiven and made to participate in his grace—those who have been restored to the heavenly image are a heaven themselves
 - “Hallowed by Thy Name” in us when we are sanctified and by the Spirit are led to act rightly
 - “Thy Kingdom come”—the person in Christ has cleansed himself in word, thought and deed
 - “as in heaven, so on earth”= that we may perfectly do the will of God as the angels do
 - “supersubstantial” (cf. Origen)=the Lord's Supper, which in mediating to us Christ and his benefits inwardly nourishes the substance of one's soul
 - “Forgive...as we forgive”: the necessity of reconciliation emphasized
 - “Lead us not into temptation (cf. Origen)=Let us not be overwhelmed when tempted and tested
 - “Deliver us from the Evil (One)” when he tempts us (cf. Origen)
- p. 78: “Holy things to the holy”—the elements set apart by the Holy Spirit are appropriate only for people who have been set apart by the Holy Spirit through conversion/baptism
- p. 79: invitation and reverent reception

Gregory of Nyssa

- Born c. 335 and chiefly educated by his older brother Basil the Great.
- Had been a lector (public reader of the Scriptures) in the church but then opted for a secular career, becoming a teacher of rhetoric and marrying (says in his treatise *On Virginity* that he was not able to enter into that state and in a letter to Gregory Nazianzus mourns the death of a certain virtuous Christian woman Theosebeia,

who in the context is most likely his wife, although some claim she was a deaconess).

- Later under the influence of Gregory of Nazianzus retired to a monastery in Pontus that Basil had founded.
- Autumn 371—against his will made bishop of Nyssa, an insignificant town in Basil's metropolitan district of Caesarea. Unlike Gregory of Nazianzus, he did not flee after the forced ordination but Basil criticized him for not being firm enough with people and not being savvy about church politics and financial matters (local heretics charged Gregory N. with misappropriation of church funds)
- Arian bishops/court prelates met in Nyssa and deposed him in his absence in 376
- Returned to his diocese after the death of the Arian emperor Valens in 378
- In 379, attended the Synod of Antioch, which sent him as an episcopal visitor to the diocese of Pontus. While there in 380, he was against his will elected archbishop of Sebaste and had to spend a few months administering the archdiocese.

Most of Gregory's writings are thought to belong to the period after 379.

An important leader at/host of the 381 Council of Constantinople (=Second Ecumenical Council), Gregory later preached funeral sermons for the imperial family.

Died c. 394.

Summary of Gregory's spiritual doctrine:

- (1) Image of God in Man
- (2) Intuition of God
- (3) Mystic Ascent

Epektasis:

- Human life consists of perpetual movement; even our approach toward God through Christ is a matter of infinite and unending progression.
- Burdened by sin and imperfection, the soul nonetheless has a desire to go outside itself and beyond itself to find the God who can never be fully and finally comprehended by limited, finite creatures. This desire for God is capable of infinite expansion as one proceeds toward God without ever actually completing one's journey toward the infinite majesty of the living God.
- It is the nature of love to stir one up to greater desire (thirst) which seeks satisfaction and motivates one to desire more of God (greater desire leading to greater purification and sanctification and greater joy).
- The wound of love: as one desires more fully to know and experience this God who is infinitely perfect and loveable, the urgency and drive (pain) to arrive at deeper communion/union increases.
 - *Hom. 12 in Cant.* (PG 44, 1037B): “[The soul] is struck and wounded by despairing of ever gaining what it desires. But this veil of sadness is taken away when it learns that the true possession of that which it loves is to never cease to desire it.”

Sermon 1

pp. 21-22: necessity of prayer emphasized (opposed to covetousness for constant material advance, which is idolatry)

pp. 23-25: prayer necessary to experience union with God and to prevent sin from gaining entrance to the soul

pp. 25-26: prayer necessary as the debt of gratitude we owe to God.

pp. 27-32: prayer transcends our wishful thinking and base desires, to which we unreflectively assent (“truly they babble nonsense, imploring God to become their fellow patient in this mental disease,” rather than aiming with God at the correction of evil)

pp. 32-34: sometimes God gives offices, honors and riches to those who pray for them to confirm and strengthen the faith of the weak and lead them to ask higher and more worthy things.

Sermon 2

p. 36: distinction between related words (euche as vow vs. proseuche as supplication)
“in heaven” intended to elevate the mind toward God

p. 39:

as long as one persists in wickedness=invocation of Devil as Father (see p. 51 middle for effect upon free will)

to call God one’s Father when one is evil is to say that God is evil and the cause and origin of one’s own wickedness

p. 42: “if virtue has really been separated from evil, it lies solely within the free choice of man to be there where his desire inclines him” (restoration of the image which consists in free and effective choice of the good)

Sermon 3

“Hallowed be thy name”

p. 48=that human nature is too weak to achieve anything good, and that therefore we can obtain nothing of the things for which we are anxious unless the good be accomplished in us by divine aid”

(compare middle of p. 50; see p. 72 on divinization)

“Let thy Kingdom come”

bottom of p. 51—let me not be ruled by sin and the passions

pp. 52-53—petitioning the help of the Holy Spirit to cleanse one from sin

(note argument for identity of operations→equality/same nature of persons in the Trinity on pp. 53-56)

Sermon 4

“Thy will be done”

health=proper proportion/balance/movement of the elements vs. illness as disorder, loss of proportion/appropriate boundaries in order/movement (concupiscence)

p. 58: restoration to spiritual health=being united to the will of God and strengthened to renounce what is contrary to the latter (see p. 59)

p. 59: due to the weakness of our nature, choice of the good must come to us from God

(p. 60: “if there is an inclination to something good, we need God to carry the good desire into effect”)

p. 61: “on earth as in heaven”=humans to be as angels in regard to the will of God (note traces of Origenism here on pp. 61-63 and the apokatastasis on p. 62)

p. 63 bread=not going beyond what is necessary in our desire for material things

p. 70: “By bread he means all our bodily requirements”

Sermon 5

p. 73: “Forgive us our debts” —the imitation reversed—we are asking God to imitate us, but our response to others takes into account God’s previous, greater goodness

p. 75: debt→as the defacing of the divine image requires a penalty

p. 76: garments of skin; not without stain one day (p. 77: shadow of the fig tree of material life)

pp. 76-77: turn toward paradise in the East (cf. Cyril)

pp. 79: stain=attraction to sensual pleasure as goal, which leads us into the debt of sin
“Deliver us from [the temptations extended by] the Evil (One)” (cf. Origen)